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Can educational systems stimulate a deliberative approach to democracy?

New Zealand and Australia, as well as a number of other democratic states, find themselves confronted by the reality of having to accommodate many and very varied groups of people who for various reasons consider themselves as having special group interests or preferences that differ from those of the majority culture. In such cases, the core democratic principle of 'one person one vote' entails a danger of creating permanent minorities who risk having their interests disregarded by what Tocqueville termed 'the tyranny of the majority'. One way out of this deadlock is to take a deliberative approach to democracy, i.e. attempt to ensure dialogic exchanges about differences of interests before taking political action on issues. This article is based on a case study of how the educational systems in two particular settings (New Zealand and Western Australia) might contribute to fostering a culture of deliberation among future citizens. To narrow down the focus, attention is concentrated on the level of inclusion of Indigenous minorities.

From a theoretical perspective, there are two important functions for the educational system within any country attempting to be an inclusive democracy. First of all, the educational sector is in itself an arena for debate about values in society, and may as such exert a certain influence on political decision-making. Secondly, the primary function of an educational system is to impart children and students with the necessary abilities to get by in democratic societies - and in extension be knowledgeable about varying life experiences and values. These two points will both be unfolded below, but primary focus will be on the role of the educational system in exposing children and young adults to various life experiences.

To analyse the empirical situation lying behind these theoretical considerations, qualitative data in the form of interviews with people involved in the educational sector in both settings will be employed. To supplement interview data, comments are included on the curriculum frameworks for both Western Australia and New Zealand. These documents complement well what I was told by respondents, and as policy statements they are very informative in terms of the values and visions policy makers wish to impart to children and adolescents in the education system.

Six coding categories will be employed in the analysis, the first two ('curricula' and 'inclusive policies') will be based on policy documents, whereas the last four all are based on interview data. These four remaining categories have the following headings: 'structure', 'decision-making and influence', 'contact and trust', and finally 'cultural sensitivity'. Based on prevalent

themes in data, these categories all serve to illuminate how the educational system contributes to expose (future) citizens to various beliefs and values, thereby presumably better equipping them to take part in democratic society.

The Curriculum Framework¹ from WA is interesting to examine closely in relation to the notion of deliberative democracy. It is a policy document with very strong value statements in connection with concepts such as ‘democracy’, ‘tolerance’, and ‘citizenship’. It was issued in 1998 and meant to be fully implemented by 2004. In the words of the document itself: ‘It is neither a curriculum nor a syllabus, but a framework identifying common learning outcomes for all students, whether they attend government or non-government schools or receive home schooling’². The emphasis on *all students* is no coincidence. The education sector in WA is deeply divided between the non-governmental and the governmental sector, with the former presently ‘winning’ over the latter in terms of attracting students. This is part of the impetus behind the framework, where the word ‘flexibility’ is greatly emphasised already from very first page, and it is stated from the outset that a greater need has been identified in 1995 for involving non-governmental schools more in developing curricula.

According to the words of the framework itself, it is a product of a consultative process involving deliberative elements. It is stated that ‘seven months of consultation took place’³ on the first draft for the framework, and that ‘a series of public meetings provided opportunities for discussion, debate and the sharing of ideas’. A number of values are specified in the framework, and in opposition to traditional syllabi, the focus is on outcomes rather than on input. In this way, the framework is envisaged to be more dynamic than a syllabus, in the sense that the outcomes-focused approach leaves greater flexibility for individual teachers and schools.

There are great differences both in terms of the geographical setting, the ethnic and socio-economic background for students in WA, as well as in the financial situation for schools. This fact has undoubtedly played an important role when wording the framework in such terms that it was acceptable to all parties (interview data suggests that also non-governmental schools were in fact happy with the framework). A typical example of how the values and intentions of the framework have been worded can be found on p.16: ‘While there is a range of value positions in our pluralistic society, there is also a core of shared values’. This is both a gesture to minority viewpoints, as well as an attempt to maintain control with the educational sector and the values imparted to students. Five such ‘core shared values’ are summarised, among those ‘social and civic responsibility, resulting in a commitment to exploring and promoting the common good; meeting

individual needs in ways which do not infringe the rights of others; participating in democratic processes; social justice and cultural diversity’⁴. These may seem rather weak value statements in the sense that hardly anybody would disagree with them. But attempts are also made within the framework to specify more directly what it would mean to impart such values to students. Particularly interesting from a deliberative democratic point of view are the descriptions of values and learning outcomes under the general learning area of ‘Society and Environment’⁵. Here concepts such as for example ‘civic responsibility’ and ‘active citizenship’ are widely used, and details are given of how children are thought best imparted with these values. The learning goal of ‘active citizenship’ is thus defined on p.252: ‘Students demonstrate active citizenship through their behaviours and practices in the school environment, in accordance with the principles and values associated with the democratic process, social justice and ecological sustainability’, and further explained as a ‘[...] respect for different choices, viewpoints and ways of living; and ethical behaviour and equitable participation in decision making’⁶.

Principles and values associated with the democratic process and with social justice would indeed be part of the core abilities necessary to endow students with, if an ideal of deliberative democracy is to be approximated within society. In this sense, the Western Australian Government is approaching a policy that can be evaluated against a deliberative democratic standard. This point is further supported by the statement that ‘The Society and Environment learning area, with its focus on civic responsibility and social competence, has a unique place in the Curriculum Framework. Its basic aim is to give individual students the ability to make reasoned and informed decisions as citizens of a culturally-diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world’⁷. Aiming to give students the ability to make reasoned and informed decisions as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society would exactly fit the core idea of aiming for deliberation when resolving disputes.

Several other formulations within the framework support the impression that while the authors may not use the term ‘deliberative democracy’, they are in effect promoting an educational system based on many of the values and requirements inherent in this normative theory. For example, it is stated as goals that ‘[Students] will seek to constantly test the integrity of information, recognise the perspectives of all stakeholders and modify conclusions and action where appropriate’⁸, and that ‘They explore the multicultural nature of Australian society; they analyse a country’s response to internal dissent; and they examine civil rights movements’⁹. These would certainly be qualifications that are important in a deliberative process. These qualifications are

broken down within the framework so that each stage in the child's development is described in conjunction with the abilities the child is supposed to have reached at a certain age. Looking at the last stage of development, just before the child leaves compulsory schooling, this description in fact resembles the model deliberating citizen – assuming that educational goals are indeed reached. Under the heading 'late adolescence/young adulthood', it is stated that 'Young adults demonstrate an understanding of political, legal and economic structures, particularly in respect of policy generation. They evaluate these systems and policies from social justice and democratic process perspectives and identify ways in which citizens can actively influence the operation of these systems' and 'Young adults should continue to demonstrate a capacity to review, and, if necessary, modify, their personal perspectives'¹⁰. If these are abilities Western Australian youth leave school with, the future for the state of democratic involvement and a system approaching deliberative democracy looks bright, indeed.

However, the question of theory versus practice comes next; even if these are abilities Western Australian school children are *supposed* to leave school with, have they in fact acquired them? Though the wordings under the 'Society and Environment' learning area especially are very impressive in terms of an ideal of deliberation, one should also not be blind to differences between saying and doing. All three respondents from WA showed great support for the content of the Curriculum Framework, but those two who 'represented' the Aboriginal schooling 'system' (both objected to the terms), also pointed out that in Aboriginal schooling (and other socio-economically pressurised groups) there is often a gap between what one wishes to accomplish and what is in fact doable. Writing an extensive policy document does not do the trick in itself, and a comparison between the WA Curriculum Framework with its 326 pages and the NZ rather minimalist framework¹¹ (23 pages) highlights this.

The NZ curriculum has been revised in 1997¹², and according to the foreword 'It brings together the best of our past curriculum experience, recommendations of the major reviews of education in recent years, and submissions from schools, boards of trustees, and the public, and the views of business and enterprise'. In other words, this policy document also claims to be the product of a more or less deliberative process, and not only has the public and the experts (schools and boards of trustees) been heard, but so has the business community - this certainly appears like an inclusive approach to people with an interest in the content of the education system.

Part of the goal identified in the curriculum is to enable students to 'develop their potential, to continue learning throughout life, *and to participate effectively and productively in*

New Zealand's democratic society and competitive world economy' (my emphasis) – as in WA, there is an emphasis on enabling students to participate in democratic society. Due to its shortness, provisions for Maori stand out more clearly in the NZ curriculum than the few words about Aboriginals in the WA Curriculum Framework. For example, it is stated that '*The New Zealand Curriculum recognises the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi*. The school curriculum [at individual schools] will recognise and value the unique position of Maori in New Zealand society. All students will have the opportunity to acquire some knowledge of Maori language and culture' (original emphasis). Mentioning the Treaty of Waitangi is more or less a given in New Zealand policy documents¹³, but while all students will have the opportunity to acquire some knowledge of Maori language and culture, English is still emphasised as the most important medium of instruction in New Zealand schools; for example under the learning area of 'language and languages', where it is stated that

Because English is the language of most New Zealanders and the major language of national and international communication, all students will need to develop the ability and confidence to communicate competently in English, in both its spoken and written forms. [...] Maori is the language of the tangata whenua of New Zealand. It is a taonga under the terms of the Treaty of Waitangi and is an official language of New Zealand. Students will have the opportunity to become proficient in Maori.

The WA Curriculum Framework does mention Aboriginals as holding a particular place in WA society, but in comparison with the NZ curriculum they take up a much less prominent place. However, using the model of deliberative democracy as a normative yardstick, the specific mentioning of minority groups is much less interesting than more general provisions for creating an inclusive society. There are many similarities between the curricula for the two settings, although the descriptions from New Zealand are much less detailed than those from WA. For example, the NZ curriculum broadly states that '*The New Zealand Curriculum reflects the multicultural nature of New Zealand society*. The school curriculum will encourage students to understand and respect the different cultures which make up New Zealand society' (original emphasis).

More or less directly comparable with the learning area of 'Society and Environment' in WA, is the learning area of 'Social sciences' in the NZ curriculum, where it is stated that 'A broad understanding of society is essential if students are to take their full place within it as confident, informed, and responsible participants. [Students] will examine the ways in which people from different cultures, times, and places make decisions [...]. Students will be helped to understand their rights, roles, and responsibilities as members of a family and as citizens in a democratic society'. Understanding different ways of decision-making and one's role within units

such as the family and society are certainly conducive if students are later to take part in deliberating processes.

As in the WA Curriculum Framework, a number of specific goals or learning outcomes are also specified for New Zealand students. Particularly interesting from a deliberative perspective are those skills described as ‘social and co-operative skills’, where it is stated that students will ‘develop good relationships with others, and work in co-operative ways to achieve common goods’, ‘participate effectively as responsible citizens in a democratic society’, and ‘develop the ability to negotiate and reach consensus’. If these are indeed goals that are reached, the future looks bright for the possibility of deliberation in New Zealand - as in WA.

Once again, however, it is expedient to point out the differences between words in a policy document and reality in schools. In WA, the educational system is strongly divided between governmental and non-governmental schools, often with great socio-economic differences between them, and with many Aboriginal children either attending poor government schools or independent Aboriginal schools, that despite their non-governmental status hardly can be compared to rich private schools. Generally speaking, the NZ educational system is much more inclusive in the sense that most students, including most Maori students, attend government schools. There are certainly also Maori students (and parents) who wish for more accommodation of Maori tradition and culture within the educational system. The New Zealand Government seems to have been successful in going at least some way towards meeting those wishes and yet retain a comprehensive schooling system. It is no coincidence that the last chapter in the curriculum includes the sentence ‘The statements are sufficiently broad and flexible to allow for local interpretation and elaboration. Such flexibility will empower schools and teachers to design programmes which are relevant to the learning needs of their students and communities’.

Interview evidence suggests that the New Zealand educational system is based on a general policy expressed for example in the curriculum, but then amply supplemented with various additional initiatives to target specific problems and wishes arising within the educational sector. The approach was certainly different within the two settings, with a very long and extremely detailed and comprehensive curriculum framework in WA, and a much shorter and more general one from NZ. Respondents in WA expressed the viewpoint that ‘existing policy’ was the be-all and end-all of Aboriginal education in WA, whereas an interview with a coordinator of the Pouwhakataki group¹⁴ in NZ gave a very different impression of the state of affairs in terms of accommodating specific Maori wishes in the NZ educational system.

Illustrating this approach of creating inclusive policies, the coordinator supplied me with a number of brochures specifically aimed at Maori students and their parents, and a number of policy documents are also available, among those a document entitled ‘Strengthening the Ministry’s response to the education needs of Maori’¹⁵. This is an example of how the Ministry of Education attempts to make room for Maori educational wishes – even wishes within a particular iwi. Under the heading ‘Iwi Education Partnerships Facts Sheet’ it is stated that

Partnerships are relationships between the Ministry of Education and either iwi, or other iwi based and formed Maori education organisations. They are established to help improve the education achievement of Maori children [...] There is no fixed way for the development and establishment of these relationships [...] There is no one size and no particular way.

This is evidence of a much more open and dynamic inclusion of particular minority wishes than I saw in WA. The Ministry is very open about its policy in this field; according to its own statements in order to overcome Maori suspicion towards the education system. ‘They [the partnerships] are helping to overcome the difficulty [*sic*], often-raised issue by Maori, of finding out what is going on in education’. The very last words on the facts sheet are ‘An important part of this work is to enable a more inclusive approach for thinking about how positive change can be effected within education. This means that the Ministry becomes one part of a wider group who can contribute to achieving better outcomes, rather than the only group’. Comparing this with evidence from WA, the New Zealand Ministry of Education seems much more ready to devolve responsibility¹⁶, which is probably part of the explanation for having retained a very inclusive educational system compared to that of WA.

Writing guidelines for an inclusive educational environment seems a profitable line of work in New Zealand judging by the sheer number¹⁷. One such document is ‘Better relationships for better learning. Guidelines for Boards of Trustees and Schools on Engaging with Maori Parents, Whanau, and Communities’¹⁸, which - as the title says – is a set of guidelines for parents on school boards to be more inclusive when engaging with Maori parents. This is a detailed set of guidelines, containing both theoretical reasons and practical ideas for greater Maori involvement in their children’s schooling, and it is stated from the beginning that ‘The choice is not whether schools develop a relationship with Maori communities but what the quality of the relationship will be’¹⁹. One practical idea for improving relationships with Maori parents is that interaction should take place *kanohi ki te kanohi*²⁰. Also interesting from a deliberative perspective, is the notion that school relationships with local iwi are important because they can provide a model for other local

organisations to follow²¹. The educational sector is directly identified as having potential for a positive influence on general levels of interaction between population groups with presumably different interests. - Something which directly supports the theoretical proposition that the sphere of education is important to include in an analysis of deliberative potential within a given society.

The remainder of this article will focus on interview data from the two settings²². Data is not directly comparable due to the different types of involvement with the education sector respondents represented. In both settings, however, an interview was conducted with a ministerial official involved in respectively Aboriginal and Maori education. A school principal was also interviewed in both settings, but from very different types of schools. One was principal at a small independent Aboriginal school in a rural community in WA. This contrast with the principal from New Zealand, who worked at a full primary school in an urban setting. So while they were nominally sitting in comparable positions, their everyday work experiences were in many ways miles apart.

The remaining part of the comparative analysis of how the educational systems in WA and NZ contribute to the public's ability to partake in deliberative processes will be based on four coding categories. These four are 'structure', 'decision-making and influence', 'contact and trust', and 'cultural sensitivity'. They are employed for two different reasons: the first category of 'structure' serves as an introductory reminder that data from these settings is not directly comparable, as issues of structure impact heavily on working conditions within the educational system. The last three categories have been included due to their correspondence with the learning goals from the respective curricula, which can be interpreted as fostering school leavers (and possibly their parents) with deliberative skills. This approach will give an overview of data and form a basis for making conclusions about the respective contributions of each educational system in terms of exposing students to various life experiences as a substitute measure for potential levels of deliberation within society. Different positions and working conditions for specific interviewees are likely to affect analytic conclusions, which is the reason for pointing them out from the outset.

Therefore, the analysis starts with 'structure', as this is a prerequisite for making sense of the rest of the data within the field. Particularly data from WA abounds in comments on 'structure' and how the Ministry of Education, schools themselves, policies, and other structural factors impact on the room for manoeuvre or lack thereof in schools. Because the division - or even the widening gap - between the governmental and the non-governmental education system was a very prevalent theme in the WA debate, focus is specifically on comments relating to this fact.

Starting with a rather neutral statement from the principal from the Aboriginal school, a second more colourful statement is included. While the latter may seem rather subjectivist, he had left the Department of Education only a few months previously, and knew about how the Department worked.

You see the Department of Education is a very large organisation and it has to create policies for Indigenous students and non-Aboriginal students as well, that are more across the board than specific to an area. [...] And I am very fearful for the government system in the next 10 years. I think the senior executives from [NN] and up are living in a cloud cuckoo land where they believe that they will always be able to influence education policy, that they will always be able to uphold their influence. What they don't understand is that when you get down to 60, 58, 56% of kids only going to government schools, the non-government school system is going to stand up and say 'well, we think what you are doing is dopey'.

Data from WA is undoubtedly heavily coloured by the fact that out of three interviewees, two were people working outside the government system. Nevertheless, divisions between the governmental and the non-governmental sectors were unquestionably an important theme in WA education, both judging by comments from a respondent within the Ministry as well as debates in the daily press²³.

The Aboriginal Independent Community Schools (AICS) have generally been founded in the early 1980s, often in remote Aboriginal communities, where Aboriginal peoples found the government sector inadequate in meeting the educational needs of their children. AICS is a very loose organisation, as the main impetus behind these schools exactly was and is *independence*. Therefore, individual schools also differ quite a lot from each other. Another respondent worked as a local resource coordinator for AICS schools. Among other things, we debated the role of these schools in relation to the governmental system. As he remarked, the schools are to a large extent dependent on existing legislation, but the bottom line is that they are and wish to remain independent. Individual schools are run by a governing body in the community, and he said that the general policy of the schools is determined by the aspirations of the community rather than from the Department of Education in Perth, which he referred to as 'the Silver City'. While he in this way distanced the AICS schools from the government system, he also said that presently there was a good level of cooperation between government and AICS schools, because at this stage it had become obvious that these schools 'survived and thrived'.

One of his points was that Aboriginal communities had learned how important it was for the entire community to have a well functioning school, and this he saw as an important factor in explaining the relative success of these schools²⁴. Another part of the explanation is the funding system. The WA State Government funds public schools directly, while private independent schools get a large part of their funding from Federal Government – this is especially true for the AICS

schools, where parent contribution is naturally very limited, as many Aboriginal parents simply do not have the means. This means that the state/federal structure has a huge impact on educational policies in WA, where the State Government may pursue a particular line, only to see itself overrun by federal money going into the private sector²⁵. The respondent from the Ministry commented on what the ultimate consequences might be.

And the Federal Government puts significantly more money into the non-government sector, and the difficulty for us is that if we are not careful, the government school system could become a residual system. Where kids tend to move across to the non-government sector, because as Western Australians become more affluent, they are prepared to pay a bit more money for education.

Comparing evidence above with data from NZ, the latter appears a much more homogenous system, even despite the relatively recent introduction of Te Kohanga Reo and the kura kaupapa system²⁶. This impression was enforced through a group interview with five people working for the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI)²⁷. Interviewer: 'To what extent are – I am wondering, how many Maori kids are in the general system?' / Respondent: 87% / Interviewer: 87%. So that's quite high. / Respondent: Very high. There is about 11-16% in kura kaupapa'. One of the reasons for maintaining such a high percentage of NZ children within the general education system, despite great ethnic diversity in the country, may be the level of flexibility built into the system. As pointed out above, the New Zealand Ministry of Education seems ready to allow for a lot of regional variance and accommodation of iwi wishes. This is an impression further supported by the explanation below, by the principal of the urban school.

Now we have two strands, really; most Maori children are in what I call general education. So they are in schools where the main medium of instruction is English. Then within that there are variations, so within what I call a general education school, you can have bilingual units where the medium of instruction is to a great degree Maori. And then it goes into total immersion, where it is still in a general education setting, but probably the teacher would speak 80-90% of the time in Maori and instruction is through the medium of Maori. [...] Then we have totally separate schools, called kura kaupapa Maori, and their philosophy is underpinned very much by a different world view, a Maori world view.

Readiness to meet the wishes of particular iwi was not only expressed in policy documents and realities within schools, but was also asserted at a very fundamental level by the respondent working in the Ministry, who referred to it as an obligation ultimately springing from The Treaty of Waitangi. 'What drives all of this is te Tiriti o Waitangi. We as the Crown – what is our responsiveness to the Treaty? That's what really drives it. And from the Treaty comes out legislation'. At a structural level, the Treaty is an important factor when explaining different levels

of interaction between the Indigenous and mainstream groups of Western Australia and New Zealand.

The second coding category from interview data, ‘decision-making and influence’, is included because it in itself is a way of illustrating possible deliberative processes. Again, data is coloured by the position of respondents; but while the AICS principal may be particularly harsh in his statements about a lack of flexibility within the Ministry of Education, where he had previously worked, the idea of ‘trying to fit a square peg into a round hole’ does resonate with other evidence.

And one of the issues I kept getting feed back from [...] my executive director, was always ‘Stick within policy’. And I kept coming back saying ‘Yeah, but policy isn’t working here’. I mean, we are talking about a group where English isn’t the first language and where parents have different aspirations for their children, they therefore want to be involved in tailoring of the education to suit their kids’ needs. It just didn’t work trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

He readily acknowledged that the government system *was* trying to allow for more flexibility in the form of local devolution and greater parent involvement. Nevertheless, he felt that these measure were not nearly taken far enough.

Government schools are *trying* to emulate the independent system via local devolution and decision-making. But they will not deal with the fundamental issues of policy, because I think they are fundamentally frightened that schools will be taken over by left-wing hoodlams who will direct the school down the pathway of hippy-ism or something like that! And the standards will begin to decline. *My* experience was the opposite. That parents involved in decision-making roles actually aspire to great things for their kids.

Judging from interview data as well as from policy documents, the WA Government system was trying to do *something*, but it is questionable whether it was the right thing in terms of securing an inclusive future for the educational sector within the state. The interviewee from the Ministry told about a number of measures to ensure greater parent involvement (and thereby retention of Aboriginal children) within schools. However, these measures seem rather ‘mechanistic’, to throw one of his own terms back at him; and he veered off my follow-up question about quality versus quantity measures.

There are *huge* mechanisms [to ensure parent participation] that are there, and we *measure* them. We want to see how many Aboriginal people are on decision-making groups, we have particular councils and groups that *must* be established, every school *must* have a plan that looks at Aboriginal education within their school plan. Every teacher must undergo cultural awareness training, compulsorily, to ensure that the system is more pro-active in its approach to getting Aboriginal parents involved, but also getting Aboriginal kids through the system.

Contrasting sharply with the impression from WA, the following statement by one of the people in the group of five from NZEI reflects a basic attitude towards possibilities for influence that fundamentally differs from the starting point in WA. ‘I think that [...] the issue about why do we

participate? Why do Maori participate? And I think that Maori participate because they have an *expectation*'. The following examples from other people working at NZEI back up the suggestion that in New Zealand the idea of specific Maori influence on educational policies was not just wishful thinking.

I can give you an example: in assessment for example [...], there has been a drive in primary schools for compulsory assessment. Well, Maori have been quite outspoken about how disadvantaged they are or have been shown to be through the ways of assessment. Because they are all sort of Pakeha type tools and a particular way of doing things [...] we have been able to hold back some of the excesses of the Government on the basis that it is not inclusive, it disadvantages Maori in schools and it continues a spiral of decline for them [...].

I was just going to add – you were talking about earlier grass roots versus policy driven change, and I was just thinking that an example that popped into my head was during the 80s, the introduction of Kohanga reo into New Zealand - early childhood Maori education. And that was really grass roots driven, the Government didn't have a lot of influence or control over that. And you can almost see it slipping under their radar because they thought 'it is only Maori, and it is only early childhood education'. And it was so successful that it has been built upon in kura kaupapa Maori education.

'Slipping under the radar' is not good deliberative practice judged by normative ideals of making one's standpoint available for public scrutiny; rather it suggests a tactical approach to obtaining impact on educational policies. Nevertheless, such success stories²⁸ may exert a positive influence on future interest in partaking in cooperation with government when developing policy initiatives. Based on comments from a Ministry employee, interest in developing joint initiatives between the Ministry and iwi groups was indeed mutual. Speaking about the three or four years of preparation that went into setting up the Pouwhakataki group, he told about a procedure that certainly appears to be built on dialogue, even if his way of talking - using direct speech references - may be a result of his idiomatic use of the English language.

What the Ministry did is it went around and went to tribal groups in New Zealand and said 'what is it the Ministry can do to help you?' And one of the greatest frustrations was in dealing with the bureaucrats or dealing with the school system. And they said 'if only we could have somebody that can talk to us in our language, what it means in terms of a board of trustees, what are their roles and functions? If somebody could also tell us in terms of the best education for my daughter or for my son. If we can only have someone when I have a problem with the school, the teachers, where I feel it is not teaching my child correctly. Or if there is problem with the administration, if only we can have somebody who can help us to explain and push it through the process'.

Such a statement (which is supported by evidence from a variety of Ministry publications) contributes to the broader picture of a Ministry that does indeed use its radar, even if people at NZEI in some instances feel that they are able to slip in something underneath it. However, not all respondents concurred with the impression that the educational policies of New Zealand were the product of dialogic interaction between Maori interests and the Ministry. The principal from the

urban primary school probably points to an important factor when arguing that Maori can thank themselves and their level of organisation for a lot of their successes within the educational system.

...it hasn't been because we have persuaded the powers that be to think our way. It has really been because we've confronted them with the issues and organised and been prepared in some instance to take legal – well, *illegal* action really. You know, things are getting really, really serious when people are prepared to take illegal action [in reference to parents withdrawing their children from state schools].

Speaking generally about the level of interaction between the population groups over the last couple of decades, she also remarked that 'it wasn't a case of us presenting such compelling arguments the majority decided to change their mind, that's *absolutely* not how I see it – and this is a personal view. It has changed because they were *made* to change it, they didn't have a choice really'. So while there is little doubt that Maori exert greater influence when educational policies are developed in New Zealand than Aboriginals do in WA, it is too hasty a conclusion to draw to say that this is because deliberative mechanisms are in place in NZ. It is also very probable that the relative sizes of the two minority groups play a large role here. But there is no doubt that the NZ Ministry of Education is geared to include iwi points of view in their planning in a much more direct way than is the case in Western Australia, where the curriculum *has* been developed with Aboriginal input, but input by those people who themselves have taken action to be heard and come forward. In this regard, the input-seeking approach by the NZ Ministry of Education, where they focus on paying visits to iwi and tailor individual solutions, is rather innovative.

Fittingly, the next category in the analysis is 'contact and trust', and here there is no doubt – neither by the Ministry's man, nor by the principal from the independent system – that especially trust is what is lacking sorely within the WA educational sector in terms of including Aboriginal students and their parents in the governmental education system. The principal explained the existence of the AICS schools as being partly a product of lack of contact with and trust in the government system: '...I think that schools like this are in some ways an exhibition of the frustration that people have had in trying to work with the government system'. He also spoke more directly about suspicion.

I didn't understand much about the way the independent system worked *at all* before I came here. And I think it is a vice versa. So there is this suspicion I suppose. [...] Because the Government is suspicious of the independent, because they are losing kids to independents. I think the independent are suspicious of the government system, because they think they are doing better anyway. Which is a pity, because I think both can take from each other and learn from each other.

Referring to historic educational policies, which would not have taken any account whatsoever of creating trust in the Aboriginal community, the Ministry representative put some of the problems within the education sector down to these policies and the remembrance of them by the parents and grandparents of the present generation of Aboriginal school children.

Now, schooling in WA for Aboriginal people commenced in 1965, compulsorily. So it is *really*, we've only been doing it for 40 odd years. Prior to that it was done by the missions and it was not compulsory schooling [...]. Unfortunately, people at my age, between 45 and 50, have had a range of experiences with school, most of which were not desirable, were not good experiences. So consequently *their* kids, they are actually not quite willing for their kids to stay at school. [...//...] I mean, most Aboriginal people see Government as – In WA, the Government took kids away, as you are well aware of, so most Aboriginal people see school as the frontline still, really that school is going to take their kids away. So that in itself is a difficulty that we have. But getting parents to understand why school is there, to trust school teachers.

Even if the goal of an inclusive educational system, where also Aboriginal parents and students will trust the system, seems a long way off in WA, initiatives by the NZ Ministry of Education proves that things can be changed – but also that the job never will be quite finished. Specific programs like the Pouwhakataki group may solve a certain set of both practical and also more trust related problems, but it also seems to be the case that an entire attitude change is needed. A recipe for how this is going to come about is hardly available, but a hint may be found in the following comment on how things have changed within an organisation like NZEI in terms of making the organisation more inclusive of Maori viewpoints, rather than 'merely' influencing government policy on behalf of Maori. 'Once upon a time I can remember, where anything – you *always* went to Maori for your answers [...], and now Maori are saying 'you've got to think this through, you have got to provide the answers for yourself'. Inclusivity is thus to be regarded not only as the problem of the minority group, but as an issue to be tackled broadly within the organisation according to the people from NZEI – and this principle could be extended to the entire society. At least according to the principal of the urban school, this is an attitude change that has to some extent occurred generally within the New Zealand educational system.

So in general education schools today, there would be very few state and integrated schools where you didn't have some basic form of te reo being spoken or being taught to the children, where their songs or their culture would be included in some form or another. And it will differ from one school to the other in terms of the substance of what is taught and shared in classes, because very much it depends on the confidence and competence of the teacher – and on an attitude change.

Some things, however, are best left to Aboriginal people themselves, according to respondents from WA. The principal from the AICS school clearly felt that in some instances the Department of Education showed a blatant lack of cultural sensitivity when it came to Aboriginal matters – giving

the following poignant example of a book which he only let me see the cover of, as it was clearly his opinion that it ought not be showed to me.

I have a copy of a book that was produced about 10 years ago [...]. It was never issued. No one knows exactly why this book was produced. This is an Education Department publication [...]. No one can look at it, because there are sacred photos in here! There is deceased people for starters, and there are a number of photographs that are sacred to Aboriginals. [...] The Department is not anthropologists. The Department should just have stuck to what it is meant to do.

The respondent from the WA Department of Education was also of the opinion that certain Aboriginal practices are best taught outside the school system, in the bush.

I think, one of the things we have to be clear about here is that – I am an Aboriginal person myself – if you want to learn about my culture, I'll take you out in the bush and I will show you what my culture is all about. Because that is where you are going to learn. But if Aboriginal kids are going to learn about Western culture, which they *must* do, they have to do it in the same environment as non-Aboriginal kids are doing it, and that is in the schooling environment. What we have to do, is to make that schooling environment as inclusive of Aboriginal kids as possible. Because what we've found is that that learning environment is not that inclusive. Now, to be able to do that, we *have* to ensure that there is an Aboriginal voice in the education process, that we, that departments and schools consult appropriately and get Aboriginal people involved.

Getting Aboriginal people involved is expedient if a deliberative goal of exposing children to various life experiences and thereby being able to conduct themselves in a diverse democratic society is to be reached. It makes little difference whether certain cultural aspects are perhaps not really appropriate subjects to be taught in a class setting by an ordinary teacher – inclusivity may take different forms in different contexts.

In conclusion

It makes theoretical sense to view schools as a trial ground for children to practice their engagement skills and be a place where they will be exposed to other life perspectives and ideas than they might meet at home. From an empirical perspective, whether this is in fact a function schools perform, can best be evaluated by a long-term comparison of social interaction in societies with a greatly segregated versus integrated school system. Based on interview evidence, however, a comprehensive integrated and inclusive schooling environment was deemed valuable by most respondents.

Viewing the educational system as an inherently important aspect in assessing deliberative practices within a democratic society is not a novel idea. The question is whether the above analysis has added information about exactly how and to what extent the educational system makes this contribution. Relating to the question of 'how', it is interesting to note that formulations

in the curricula for both settings point to an awareness of educating future citizens who should ideally be able to conduct themselves in societies with people holding a variety of beliefs and preferences. Relating to the question of ‘extent’, the marked difference between the relative successes of the governmental education systems points to what might potentially be damaging implications for the level of inclusivity within the Western Australian educational system. Risking a split between the well-off and children whose parents for various reasons do not endorse government schooling and then ‘the residue’, does not bode well for a system which professes to aim for educating all children to become ‘active citizens’ and be able to engage profitably with people of other values and preferences.

Further on the question of ‘extent’, evidence shows that particularly the New Zealand Ministry of Education has been, and continues to be, very open to trial new models of education and listen to the needs and wishes of different parental groups and their school children. This does not mean that control is relinquished, but rather that diverging interests are kept within range of the Ministry’s working. Whether one wishes to interpret this as ‘control’, or merely as an effort to span widely, is probably a question of temperament. In the words of one respondent commenting on te kohanga reo.

Well, kohanga reo started off as a break-away movement and an ethic to try and foster Maori language. [...] But now it has become integrated into the system, and it gets government funding and all the rest of it. [...] by meeting certain criteria they can access educational funding, and that of course brings them into the system, and they get assessed alongside every other institute of like kind.

As pointed out above, Maori parents were at one point taking *illegal action* and removing their children into Maori language immersion schools. Now those schools under the kaupapa Maori ideology have become a separate branch within the governmental system. However, in the words of Bishop and Glynn ‘... Kaupapa Maori is a discourse that has emerged and is legitimated *from within* the Maori community. Kaupapa Maori assumes the taken-for-granted social, political, historical, intellectual and cultural legitimacy of Maori people, in that it is a position where ‘Maori language, culture, knowledge and values are accepted in their own right’ (Smith 1992)²⁹. The words ‘from within’ have been emphasised in this quote, because even if the kura kaupapa schools now sort under the Ministry, they still ultimately spring from Maori interest, and can therefore be regarded as proof of the Ministry’s willingness to enter into dialogue with Maori. Fleras and Spoonley cite exactly the kura kaupapa schools as an instance of tino rangatiratanga in practice³⁰ - as promised to Maori in the Treaty of Waitangi. They conclude, ‘...in securing a pattern of

constructive engagement that sharply curbs state jurisdiction while enhancing Maori models of self-determination, kura kaupapa Maori serves notice that rangatiratanga rights are not to be taken lightly in post-colonising Aotearoa'³¹.

There is no question about the fact that the Treaty of Waitangi heavily influences Crown/Maori relations in New Zealand, and that the Aboriginal people of Western Australia cannot refer to a historic document that should protect their interests within for example education. This deficit, however, hardly precludes the possibility of 'securing a pattern of constructive engagement', provided genuine interest really exists. Both the lack of a treaty as well as the historical suspicion towards any government agency adversely impact on Aboriginal abilities to make the most of the educational system in terms of securing themselves a place within deliberating practices.

Based on data presented here, there is a marked difference between Western Australia and New Zealand in terms of creating an inclusive educational environment based on deliberative democratic principles. Engagement practices between the Indigenous minority and the mainstream majority function considerably better in New Zealand than they do in Western Australia. This is true both for measures deemed important by actors themselves, such as e.g. retention of Indigenous children within the educational system and the inclusion of all societal groups within the same system³². But also a qualitative measure based on deliberative ideals suggests that the New Zealand educational system fares better in being inclusive.

This conclusion is based on a number of indicators. The WA Curriculum Framework is an impressive policy document in terms of articulating ideals of 'democracy' and 'active citizenship'. Nevertheless, it is in one perspective a rhetorical policy document; and while it has been developed in cooperation with stakeholders also outside the State Government system, those stakeholders are to a large extent those identified by the Department of Education itself. Furthermore, its sheer comprehensiveness impedes the room for manoeuvre in individual schools. In comparison, the New Zealand curriculum leaves many more decisions to individual schools. But what is more important in this connection, is the fact that the New Zealand Ministry of Education continually develops new programs in cooperation with stakeholders, and is very proactive in terms of seeking input to policies and frameworks. Furthermore, the ministry is geared to tailor individual solutions to iwi. As suggested in the quote above, it would be naïve to consider this a relinquishment of control, and while one NZEI representative suggested that te Kohanga reo was slipped under the Ministry's radar in the early 1980s, this does not seem a likely scenario in post-

2000 policies. The Ministry is attuned to change, whether one would interpret this as first and foremost a deliberative gesture, or more being a question of wishing to retain control. The quote below, however, does suggest willingness to devolve responsibility and control.

An important part of this work is to enable a more inclusive approach for thinking about how positive change can be effected within education. This means that the Ministry becomes one part of a wider group who can contribute to achieving better outcomes, rather than the only group.³³

In terms of concrete suggestions for improvement in Western Australia, the most obvious would be to try to emulate New Zealand Ministry of Education practices when engaging with Aboriginal parents and other stakeholders within the educational system. While the comment that at the moment the Western Australian Department of Education was trying to ‘fit a square peg into a round hole’ may be a little harsh, greater room for individual (tribal/geographic) wishes may go a long way in terms of ensuring future success also for the State Government schooling system. The first impediment here, however, would be the pronounced lack of trust between the Government and many Aboriginals, which was pointed out both by stakeholders within and outside the governmental system. This is a question that needs to be addressed directly, and one starting point might be to develop closer cooperation with the already established non-governmental schools within the AICS system. The respondent from the Department of Education pointed out how bizarre it was to have both an independent and a government primary school in the small rural town in question (ca. 1200 inhabitants). An obvious step would be for the Ministry to encourage cooperation within selected areas, with the specific aim of fostering trust.

However, no easy solutions are available, and while the New Zealand Ministry of Education has been successful in bringing te Kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Maori within its reach, the federal/state structure in Australia also impacts on the relationship between governmental and non-governmental schools in this setting.

Concerning the deliberative potential inherent in fostering an inclusive environment, note should also be taken of the many policy documents and guidelines for schools and boards of trustees published in New Zealand. These documents not only contained suggestions for good engagement practices, but one of them even suggested that such practices could inspire other local forms of cooperation *outside* schools³⁴. This means that not only may schools have an educating function in imparting children with abilities to express their opinions and preferences and listen to those of others, but their parents, teachers, board members etc. may gain experiences in those fields as well, through cooperative practices developed in connection with school work. If such ideals are

brought to life within the schooling environment, it is very important indeed to include the sphere of education in a qualitative assessment of deliberative practices within society. Not only in the sense that it fosters deliberating abilities in future citizens, but also because the sphere of education in itself is an important arena for debate about values and preferences in society.

¹ The Curriculum Council, Western Australia, 'Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia', 1998. ISBN 07307 27017.

² Ibid., p.6.

³ Ibid., p.7.

⁴ Ibid., p.16.

⁵ Ibid., p.249-288.

⁶ Ibid., p.261.

⁷ Ibid., p.251.

⁸ Ibid., p.255.

⁹ Ibid., p.258.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.278.

¹¹ The New Zealand Curriculum Framework, from www.tki.org.nz/r/governance/nzcf/index_e.php downloaded on June 15th 2004 (23 pages in total). Unfortunately, no page references are available as the online text is not well-formatted.

¹² According to Russell Bishop and Ted Glynn, *Culture Counts: Changing Power Relations in Education*, Zed Books, London and New York, 2003, p.135. (Original publication by The Dunmore Press Ltd, Palmerston North, New Zealand, 1999).

¹³ At least those drawn up after 1986, according to Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley, *Recalling Aotearoa. Indigenous Politics and Ethnic Relations in New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1999, p.121.

¹⁴ Pouwhakataki is a group of people employed by the New Zealand Ministry of Education to work locally with Maori groups to help them get the most out of the education system. See 'Who are the Pouwhakataki?', information brochure about the Pouwhakataki group from the New Zealand Ministry of Education, published by the Ministry of Education, Wellington, New Zealand. Publication date unknown, ministerial identification number EDU0946-10/03-12K HU-1053-TM.

¹⁵ 'Twi partnerships facts sheet', published by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Available at www.minedu.govt.nz, Homepage for the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Document id 7394. Accessed on April 27th 2005.

¹⁶ According to Bishop and Glynn, *Culture Counts*, the New Zealand Ministry of Education has changed its policies rather dramatically to be more inclusive of Maori during the 1990s – see especially pp.96-98.

¹⁷ Moreover, the media does in fact show some interest in these policy documents, for example in the article 'Maori education gets high priority' from The Dominion Post, May 31st 2004, p.11 which comments on the Ministry of Education's *Statement of Intent 2004-2009*. See 'Statement of Intent 2004-2009', published by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Available at www.minedu.govt.nz Document id 9644. Accessed on August 12th 2005.

¹⁸ 'Better relationships for better learning. Guidelines for Boards of Trustees and Schools on Engaging with Maori Parents, Whanau, and Communities', published by the Ministry of Education, Wellington, New Zealand, 2000. Available at www.minedu.govt.nz, Document id 4231. ISBN 0 478 23848 7. Accessed on April 27th 2005.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.7.

²⁰ Ibid., p.10.

²¹ Ibid., p.25.

²² All interviews were carried out in the first half of 2004. A total of ten persons were interviewed, five of these in one group session.

²³ A rough count of articles from The Western Australian between February 9th 2004 and April 8th shows 52 stories on the school system, out of which 31 focused on public/private schooling. A distant second prioritised subject was the lack of male teachers within the public school system. See for example The West Australian, February 25th 2004, p.17, 'Parents turn from State Schooling', by Charlie Wilson-Clark.

²⁴ Relative, because most of the schools are still battling heavy socio-economic and health disadvantages. One school on the AICS homepage cited 85% of their pupils as having hearing disorder due to the simple infection otitis media, which, if not treated with penicillin, can permanently damage a child's hearing abilities. www.aics.wa.edu.au Homepage for the Aboriginal Independent Community Schools. Accessed on February 3rd 2005.

²⁵ At the time of conducting the interviews, every single State Government was Labour led, while the Federal Government was Conservative.

²⁶ Te Kohanga Reo literally means 'language nest' and is a pre-school offer to Maori and other children where interaction takes place in te reo Maori. It was introduced in 1982. Subsequently it has been followed up by the kura kaupapa schools, which are a schools built on 'Maori philosophy and principles', Bishop and Glynn, *Culture Counts*, p.61.

²⁷ See www.nzei.org.nz Homepage for the New Zealand Education Institute. Accessed on July 7th 2005.

²⁸ 'Success' both in the sense of having an interest converted into a political decision, but also success in the sense that 'The success of the language nests [Te Kohanga Reo] has been phenomenal', Bishop and Glynn, *Culture Counts*, p.74.

²⁹ Bishop and Glynn, *Culture Counts*, p.63, my emphasis. The internal reference is to G.H. Smith, 'Tane-nui-a-rangi's legacy...propping up the sky: Kaupapa Maori as resistance and intervention'. A paper presented at the New Zealand Association for Research in Education/Australia Association for Research in Education joint conference. Australia, Deakin University, November 1992.

³⁰ Fleras and Spoonley, *Recalling Aotearoa*, pp. 31-37, subchapter entitled 'Tino rangatiratanga in practice: kura kaupapa Maori'.

³¹ Fleras and Spoonley, *Recalling Aotearoa*, p.37.

³² This is not to deny that there is room for improvement also within the New Zealand system in terms of being inclusive of Maori school children.

³³ This is the last sentence from 'Iwi partnerships facts sheet', the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Document id 7394.

³⁴ See 'Better relationships for better learning. Guidelines for Boards of Trustees and Schools on Engaging with Maori Parents, Whanau, and Communities', the Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2000. Available at www.minedu.govt.nz, accessed on April 27th 2005.